

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MATAWINIE:  
A CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROJECT**



**CARRIED OUT BY THE PROJECT'S CORE MEMBERS  
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## Description of the Territory's Characteristics

Matawinie is one of the six RCMs within Lanaudière's administrative region, located North-East of Montreal. Its name comes from the Matawinie river (which means crossing of waters in Atikamekw) that flows North of the territory. The RCM covers over 200 km from the North to the South and represents an area totalling 11000 km<sup>2</sup>, which makes it Lanaudière's biggest territory. The territory is marked by a concentration of the population in the Southern part, while the Northern part is a big wooded territory, which gives the region a strong potential for the logging industry. That is why the population density is so weak, i.e. 5 inhabitant/km<sup>2</sup>. The Matawinie is also recognized for its landscapes, its lakes (over 10 600), and the many recreational activities that make it a choice location for regional tourism and vacation, especially in the summer.

The total population of Lanaudière region is 407 937 inhabitant, of which 47 588 live in Matawinie. In the Southern half of the Matawinie, there are fifteen municipalities and in the Northern half, an Atikamekw reserve as well as non-organized territories. Matawinie has a unique cultural diversity. On top of the Atikamekw community, there are over thirty nationalities in the municipality of Rawdon alone, which is the most populated with about 10 000 inhabitants.

The population is aging: the most important concentration is aged between 45 and 65. In 2001, 45% of the population aged 15 and up did not have a high school diploma. Moreover, 12 035 families live under the poverty line. These characteristics, as well as many others, make Matawinie the most economically disadvantaged of the Lanaudière region.

## **Project History**

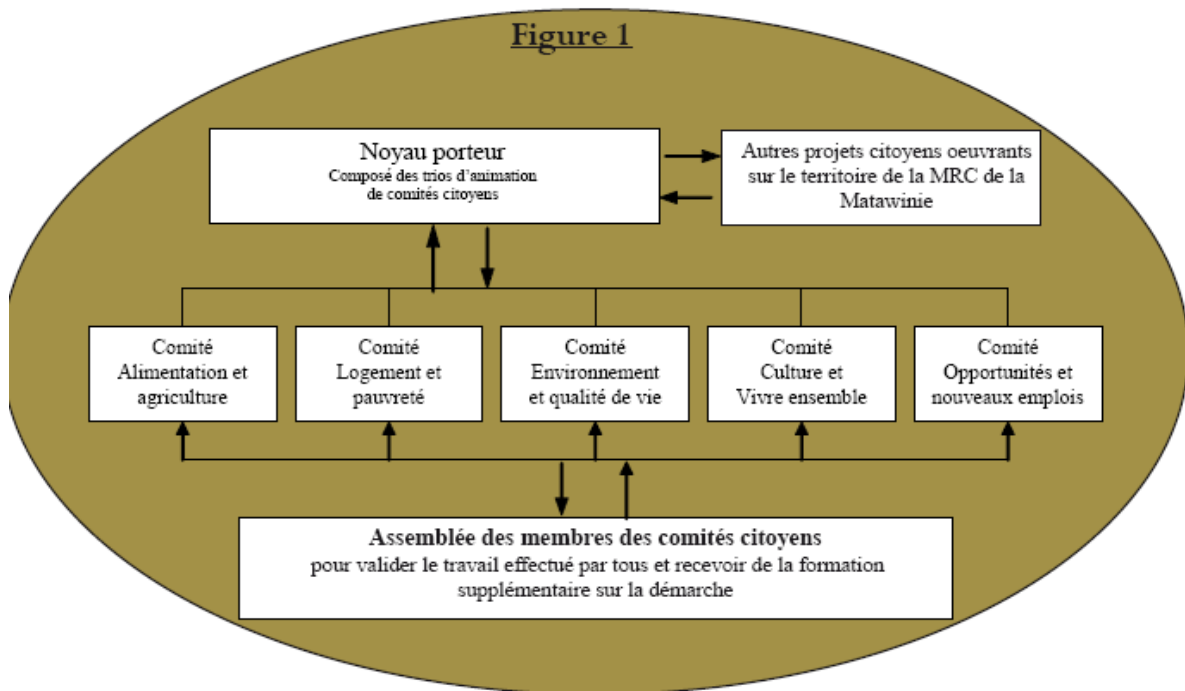
In 2004, some of Matawinie's socio-economic development organizations (CLSC, SADC, CJE, Les Filandières Rehabilitation Centre) have implemented a citizen participation project for sustainable development. This initiative was a follow-up to the local animation initiative that took place (1997-1998) in three of Matawinie's municipalities (Saint-Jean-de-Matha, Sainte-Émélie-de-l'Énergie and Sainte-Béatrix) following recommendations expressed at the Poverty Forum in Matawinie (1997). The idea to start-up this project came from development officers in the Lanaudière region, after they followed a series of territorial animation and sustainable development trainings. The main goal was to develop a territory following new methods, i.e. with active citizen participation at every step of the development.

This initiative, better known as the "Projet de participation citoyenne Matawinie" was supported by the organizations previously mentioned to structure the process that was undertaken. To launch this new initiative, the organizing committee called upon an expert trainer in the local development and citizen participation field, Mr. Loïc Dutay who has over 25 years experience in this field. Thus, project-instigating organizations along with over sixty citizen volunteers attended various trainings on processes and means to get to a "territory project" for Matawinie.

The main objective of such a project is to mobilize citizens, elected representatives, and development organisations, to take better part in the territory's development by actively participating in projects that they have themselves elaborated and that will be achieved, and which respect sustainable development principles.

# Project Operational Structure

The operational structure set up in the first months of the project's beginning is composed of a core group and five topic specific committees, each of about ten citizens, who deal with five subjects of concern (which are the committee's names) according to citizen's perceptions on the Matawinie territory. (Figure 1)



## The Core Group

The core group, also named Matawinie's citizen participation committee, is composed of representatives from the project's different citizens committee, i.e. three representatives per topic specific committees who are generally the animation trios for a total of fifteen people. This trio is usually composed of a facilitator, a co-facilitator and a secretary. This committee is a place to share information on the process between different citizen committees as well as other citizen projects emerging on the Matawinie territory. This group meets as needed, about once a month.

### **Citizen Committees**

The five citizen committees are mainly composed of citizens that come from different municipalities of the Matawinie. In these committees, an animation trio is present to push forward citizen's ideas and actions in a structured manner. In these committees, facilitators are generally development officers of the territory, because they are the ones who have the most experience in group facilitation. However, they only give the right to speak, set discussions back on track, etc. Citizens, elected representatives or others, can occupy the co-facilitator and the secretary positions.

### **Financing of the Process**

The project was financed through contributions of the Société d'aide au développement de la collectivité (SADC) Matawinie and by the Conférence régionale des élus (CRÉ) de Lanaudière via the regional development fund. On top of contributing to the project's financing, SADC Matawinie has also contributed to the project's support by delegating certain members of its team of professionals to the project. Same goes for the Centre communautaire bénévole Matawinie (CCBM), the CLSC Matawinie and the Carrefour jeunesse emploi (CJE) Matawinie, as well as some mayors and municipal councils on the territory.

The financing has paid for training sessions offered by Mr. Loïc Dutay, rental of the hall for the occasion and some meals offered during the participant's training. The vast majority of these expenses were brought on by the first two years of the project. For the third year, because committees are at the point of achieving projects and initiatives, people in charge of them have to look for their own financing, on a per case basis.

## Process Procedure

In 2004, the project began with the gathering of a small number of development officers and elected representatives. This group has mobilized citizens who live on the Matawinie territory to participate in this project by joining topic specific meetings, according to their affinity to the topics targeted by these committees. The topics are the following: Food and agriculture, Housing and poverty, Environment and quality of life, Culture and living, Opportunities and new employment.

### Diagnosis

For about one year, from 2004 to 2005, the different committees diagnosed their territory according to a specific topic. To draw the portraits of the region, first they based themselves on their perceptions, knowledge, etc. After, they researched statistical data, studies and reports, etc. in order to validate their perceptions or knowledge. During the whole process, contributors from different organization guided them and provided them with different useful information to draw the portrait. Here are the cross-cutting assessments for the five diagnosis that emerged from different citizen committees:

- Wish to protect the environment and the diversity of heritage
- We are faced with an environment that is becoming more complex (higher costs, increase of standards, etc.)
- Lack of resources (financial, material, assistance programs, etc.)
- Badly informed citizens (rights, programs, resources, etc.)
- The Matawinie territory has a good natural potential to exploit (human resources, landscape, raw material to develop, etc.)
- Youth exodus towards urban centres
- Shuttling of most Montreal workers
- Low education level
- Difficult access to services (transport, distance, etc.)
- Need to reintroduce people who are excluded from society
- Intergenerational links less and less present

Many more specific assessments were mentioned, but the list would be too long for the needs of this summary presentation of the project.

### **Priorization of Problems**

The second year, in 2006, served to target some problems judged to be more of a priority by committees. After, a more in depth analysis of the territory, for already fulfilled projects, was done to identify what was missing:

- Lack of education in the population
- Supply difficulties
- Shortage of low cost labour
- Lack of local organic products and food for food aid
- Increase of costs, difficulty of access to resources
- Difficulty of respecting rules and regulations because they are not adapted to the rural environment
- Citizens have weak knowledge of their rights and programs that are at their disposal
- Real ignorance or bad faith of certain people concerning simple basic environmental notions
- Low level of consideration for citizen's wishes in municipal decisions, etc.
- Low interest of citizens to get involved in the development of their region
- Reach out to every generation and involve excluded people.

### **Citizen Committees Member's Assembly**

On October 1<sup>st</sup> 2005, a meeting of every citizen involved in the project took place in St-Alphonse-Rodriguez, where during the day, members of the citizen committees were able to meet. It was the first time citizens could actually discuss and meet other citizens who are involved in this project.

### **Process Procedure**

That day had the goal of educating about the process in which citizen committees are evolving. It coincided with the end of the first step of the process – the diagnosis. Throughout the day, participants were able to get a better vision of the extent of the project, the steps to accomplish and the means used to get there. During that day, participants went through a prospective exercise that was aimed at imagining a better, but real, situation for the territory.

Comments on expectations are summarized as such:

- Population sensitive to environmental issues and sustainable development (awareness and action)
- Appreciation of help and solidarity
- Priority given to local products (food security)
- Mobilization and pressure from individuals to influence elected representatives' decisions
- Youth stay in the regions and live well
- Graduates come back in their region
- Increase of intergenerational exchanges
- Establishment of an affordable community transport system
- The local agriculture is able to provide required stocks to the region's residents (self-sufficiency)

- Better control of public and private forests (faster reforestation and more of it)
- Better management of domestic and industrial residual waste
- Improvement of Matawinie residents' sense of belonging
- More frequent and positive exchanges with Manawan residents
- Implementation of public areas destined to the community and favourable to physical activities for every age group
- Decrease of poverty
- More present and accessible help would be available for impoverished families
- Increase of employment in Matawinie (good salaries and good conditions)
- Access to medical services

### **Course of Action**

According to targeted problems and results anticipated (prospective), committee members should develop realistic courses of action that would link problems and situations anticipated on the territory. These courses of actions should be project ideas that would be developed and achieved by citizen committee members. Here is a summary of global objectives expressed:

- Make a practical analysis of sustainable development issues on the territory
- Create awareness among citizens and elected representatives
- Favour the creation of projects (citizen participation)
- Offer training activities
- Promote changes in consumption habits
- Develop environmental consciousness
- In January 2007, committees are at the point of bringing their course of action to completion.

### **Follow-up**

At the moment, the core group has the task of following-up on the process. This committee makes sure the project remains active. This committee is presently drawing up a series of rules, a code of ethics and principles related to the project and its accomplishment. The goal of this process is to have referral documents which can be used in certain situations and ensure that every citizen committee follows the same rules and principles.

Moreover, the core group is committed to supporting the future of the project through mobilization and relations with elected representatives and organizations on the territory, which are still fragile for now.

## **8<sup>th</sup> *Université de Pays* in Matawinie**

### **October 2006, “8<sup>th</sup> *Université de Pays*” in Matawinie**

In October 2006, the Matawinie territory hosted the 8<sup>th</sup> *Universités de Pays*. This event was a place of meeting between territorial development officers from different territories of the Quebec province, mostly from the Lanaudiere region, from France, from Guadeloupe and Morocco. In this 6-day conference, over 200 participants took part in discussion workshops, round tables, field visits and other activities. For the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of *Université de Pays*, the cross-cutting issue was: “The sustainable development era, between yesterday and tomorrow: the challenge of the next generation and the essential link to youth”.

During this conference, workshops were primarily based on targeted problems (mentioned before) by citizen committees of the citizen participation project in Matawinie, and to complete topics of other workshops, we based them on problems talked about with citizen committees of other citizen processes in the Lanaudiere region. Event participants noticed that problems experienced on their territories are generally the same as those experienced on other territories that seem different and far away such as metropolitan France and Guadeloupe.

This event gave tools or ideas related to their problems to different citizen groups. Thus, many local or regional projects are in preparation because of exchanges that took place.

## Achievements

The project opened the door to a new governance method on our territory. So, because of citizen's and worker's motivation in this citizen process, we were able to show development organizations and elected bodies that participation of citizen committees in their region's development is not a menace to their decision power but rather, an advantage and a lending hand to decision makers for projects they develop or accomplish, so they correspond to the reality lived by citizens and not be imposed.

Two projects are presently in the achievement phase. Thus, the Housing and poverty committee proceeded to incorporating their group named "Les citoyens bâtisseurs". This group mainly concentrates its action on poverty issues and social exclusion by offering support to all initiatives that provide access to affordable and quality housing. Their services were already required for a project initiated in cooperation with Entrelacs and Notre-Dame-de-la-Merci municipalities.

The Food and agriculture committee, now named "comité de participation sur la multifonctionnalité, l'agroforesterie et l'alimentation de Matawinie" or "COPAC MAAM", works to develop courses of action that emerged during the information and discussion days around different subjects related to food and agroforestry held in November 2007. These days consisted of a conference presented on two days, discussion workshops according to participants' interests, a plenary, development of courses of action and determination of priorities for action. This project first aimed at achieving an upgrade of knowledge in agroforestry and agricultural multifunctionality in Matawinie.

Secondly, the event had the goal of determining shared courses of action that apply to the Matawinie territory for agroforestry and agricultural multifunctionality. This project was managed by citizens working in the "COPAC MAAM" and that benefited from technical support from different organizations of the territory.

One of the most important accomplishments, from our point of views, was the improvement of the synergy between service and development organisations, partly due to the implication of many of them in local animations.

## Lessons Learned and Challenges

In the whole project, some elements are to be corrected or re-evaluated. Thus, as for the chosen territory, after experimentation, we should have accomplished the territory project according to life basins or municipality groupings because targeting a territory according to administrative frontiers is not necessarily representative of natural basins. Moreover, in the organisation of different meetings, we didn't take into account some seasonal realities. In fact, since part of the territory's population works in the agriculture field and it is time for seeding or cropping, and when a big number of citizen participate in hunting, the citizen participation rate in our committees was subject to an important decrease. So the committees had to pause, which caused the process to be longer than expectations established at the beginning of the project. It is important to take into account some singular and contextual realities when accomplishing a project.

We also noticed that demands related to the preparation of the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of *Université de Pays* in Matawinie has caused a loss of impetus among citizens. It is important to respect citizen's rhythm and their commitment level in projects and committees.

For challenges to come, we believe that keeping citizen committees mobilized and interesting new ones will be our two biggest challenges. We will also have to preserve new synergies between development organizations in the Matawinie and follow the operation with different participation methods such as:

- Mobilization by topics
- Mobilization by target population
- Mobilization by territory basin
- Mobilization from a local community (i.e. Village)

We will also have to make sure we organize consistency between all these emerging local animations in Matawinie.

In conclusion, we can state that supporting the development of a citizen participation project of this magnitude is long-term work. It is really important that elected representatives, organizations and citizens all realize that concrete results for all efforts put in this type of project are only perceivable in the long run and that there is really no need to get discouraged, it is worth it.